

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

RICHARD 'DICKIE' CAREW REYNELL

Test Pilot / Fighter Pilot (RAF) World War 2



*Portrait image of
FLTLT Richard Reynell
(RAF Shoreham Museum)*

Richard Carew Reynell, nicknamed Dickie, was born in Reynella, South Australia, on 12 August 1912 into the prominent Reynell winemaking family. His father, LTCOL Carew Reynell, was killed in action at Gallipoli on August 28, 1915, while commanding the 9th Light Horse Regiment. Dickie was educated at St Peter's College in Adelaide and went to England in 1929 to read agriculture at Balliol College at Oxford University.

He joined the University Air Squadron in 1930 and was commissioned in March 1931. He transferred to the Royal Air Force in September 1931 when he obtained a short-service commission. On 28 September he commenced flying training at No 5 Flying Training School at RAF Sealand in northern Wales. Graduating as a pilot, he was posted to No 43 Squadron at RAF Tangemere, one of the RAF's leading fighter squadrons, in England's south.

Quickly establishing himself as an excellent pilot, he became a member of the squadron's Hawker Fury Acrobatic Team and flew one of three Furies of the squadron which performed at the International Air Meeting at Brussels on 11th June 1933. He was then posted to a staff position at Duxford in December 1934 before being posted as an instructor at No 8 Flying Training School, Montrose, on 4th May 1936. Pursued by Hawker Aircraft Company as a Test Pilot, he transferred to the RAF Reserve as a Reserve Air Force Officer (RAFO) in January 1937 and returned to Australia for a short time before taking up employment with Hawker Aircraft Company.



*Reynell in flying gear in 1934
With an Armstrong Whitworth Siskin aircraft in the background.*

Richard was a skilled and daring pilot, featuring often in the pages of Flight Magazine. He was recognised widely as a superb demonstration pilot and his judgment of speed and height was perfect. He was not just a showman. He had a high degree of skill and accuracy and a personal pride in ensuring perfection. Geoffrey de Havilland, the renowned British aviation pioneer and aircraft designer, considered him 'an excellent test pilot and a gallant gentleman'.

In 1939 he performed what was described at the time as the best ever aerobatic display at the Brussels Air Show in a Hawker Hurricane. A journalist for the popular journal *Aeroplane* wrote "By some strange

means Flight-Lieut Reynell and a Hawker Hurricane were interpolated into the programme and the sky while Wellington bombers were still on parade. He did everything with the machine which a Hurricane could reasonably be expected to do, and then some more. With all due respect to all the other brilliant aerobats of the afternoon, there is no doubt that Reynell stole the show."

With the start of World War 2, he re-joined the RAF and was seconded back to Hawker to continue his test pilot duties. He was attached to No 43 Squadron RAF, his original squadron, for operational experience at RAF Tangmere on 26 August 1940, in the middle of the Battle of Britain. Indeed, the station had just endured a devastating attack on 16 August 1940 when hundreds of Stuka dive bombers and fighters crossed the English coast and attacked Tangmere. There was extensive damage to buildings and aircraft on the ground and 14 ground staff and six civilians were killed, but the station was kept in service and brought back into full operation.

During the next two weeks Reynell claimed one ME 109 fighter destroyed and several probable while undertaking combat air patrols from Tangmere. On 7 September, Reynell was called back to Hawker to replace a pilot who had been killed. He decided to complete the day's flying operations before returning to Hawker. He conducted a



FLTLT Richard 'Dickie' Reynell

airframe / engine test on his Hurricane V7257 following it receiving damage the previous day in combat. He completed the test flight by beating up the airfield in a continuous barrel roll down the length of the airfield with contrails from the wingtips forming a twisted vapour trail behind him which left ground crews awe struck.



FLTLT Richard 'Dickie' Reynell, seated second from right, with other 43SQN aircrew relaxing at the Officers Mess, RAF Tangmere on 7 Sep 1940, only hours before their doomed aerial engagement.

The remainder of the morning and early afternoon was somewhat quiet with the aircrew able to relax and in chairs outside the Base Officers Mess. However, late in the afternoon, British radars and plotters detected a mass German raid building. About 4:30pm, No 43 Squadron was called into action requiring him to conduct a combat sortie on his final day with the Squadron

It ended up being the day of the Luftwaffe's first large scale raids against London and in his last sortie, Reynell's squadron with 12 aircraft in the air encountered 100 German planes. Reynell was the lead of one section of three aircraft. The 43 SQN aircraft engaged the

German raid over Folkestone and fought a fierce aerial engagement to London.

In dramatic dogfights, 43 SQN suffered losses including the 28-year-old Australian who was shot down by enemy fighters over south London. Struck by cannon fire from a Me109, his aircraft fragmented into three large pieces. The engine smashed through the roof of a church setting it alight. Literally blown out of the Hurricane wounded, Reynell's parachute failed to open and he fell to his death near Blackheath, southeast of London.

Dickie Reynell became the 7th Australian to be killed in action in the Battle of Britain. He left a widow, Enid Margorie Allan, and a son aged 15 months; a tragic irony given his father died in combat when he was three.

Dickie Reynell is buried at Brookwood Cemetery, Pirbright, Surrey, England. In June 2013, a memorial was unveiled close to the crash site on Point Hill Park overlooking the London skyline.



The memorial to FLTLT Richard Reynell overlooking London (VWMA)

The memorial comprises a granite rock with a plaque inscribed with the words:

“In memory of Flight Lieutenant Richard Carew Reynell from Australia of No 43 Squadron who lost his life near this spot on 7th September 1940 in Hurricane V7257, he was 28 years old. Memorial dedicated on 28th June 2013 by the Shoreham Aircraft Museum supported by the Royal Borough of Greenwich.”

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